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The situation in the Middle East

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Letter dated 7 December 2011 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On 24 November 2011, the Deputy Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa met in Moscow in the format of BRICS to discuss the situation in the Middle East and North Africa.

The participants at the meting underlined the legitimacy of the aspirations of the peoples of the region for greater political and social rights. They agreed that the transformation processes in the region created the need to search for ways of addressing crises in countries in the Middle East and North Africa within the framework of international law and only through peaceful means, without resorting to force, through establishing a broad national dialogue with due respect for the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the countries in the region. They rejected violence as a means of achieving political goals. They emphasized the need for full respect of human rights by all sides, especially by the authorities, in protecting unarmed civilians.

The role of the United Nations Security Council was emphasized, since it bears the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. It was noted that all parties should strictly implement the decisions of the Security Council. They noted that it was inadmissible to impose solutions on the States in the Middle East and North Africa through outside intervention in the internal political processes.

The BRICS Deputy Foreign Ministers stressed that the only acceptable way to resolve the internal crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is through urgent peaceful negotiations with the participation of all parties, as provided by the Arab League initiative, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians. Any external interference in Syria's affairs not in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations should be excluded. In this context, the experience of the international community with regard to developments in Libya needs a thorough review to see if the actions taken were in conformity with the provisions of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

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The participants expressed their support for the Libyan people's democratic aspirations on the basis of public consensus and through a comprehensive national political dialogue with the participation of all segments of Libyan society. They reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the leading role of the United Nations and its Security Council in post-conflict settlement and reconstruction in Libya. In this regard, the participants emphasized the importance of the establishment of the United Nations mission in Libya tasked to support the transition process in the country. They also noted the demand for consolidated efforts by the international community, including those of the African Union, with a view to helping to overcome the devastating consequences of the civil war and reaffirmed the readiness of the BRICS countries to make meaningful contributions to building a free, democratic and stable Libya that enjoys development.

The BRICS countries welcomed the signing of the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council concerning the peaceful transition of power in Yemen, which took place in Riyadh on 23 November. They fully appreciated the constructive position of the Yemeni parties, which demonstrated their responsibility and concern for the interests of the country and its people. The participants acknowledged the successful efforts undertaken by the international community, the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Mr. Abdellatif Zayani, and the representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Jamal Benomar. The participants called on all the political forces in Yemen to do their utmost now to implement the agreement on transition of power peacefully. The participants considered that the approach adopted for addressing the situation in Yemen, based on the dialogue between the authorities and the opposition, can be applied to similar situations in the region.

The participants agreed that the period of fundamental transformation taking place in the States of the Middle East and North Africa should not be used as a pretext to delay resolution of lasting conflicts but that it should rather serve as an incentive to settle them, in particular the Arab-Israeli one. Resolution of this and other long-standing regional issues would generally improve the situation in the Middle East and North Africa. Thus, at the meeting, the participants confirmed their commitment to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of the universally recognized international legal framework, including the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The BRICS States support the resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations aiming at the establishment of an independent, viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian State with full sovereignty within the 1967 borders, with agreed-upon territorial swaps and with East Jerusalem as its capital. They also encouraged the Quartet to intensify its efforts towards early realization of these goals.

The participants supported Palestinian efforts to achieve membership in the United Nations. They also underscored the importance of direct negotiations between the parties to reach final settlement. They called upon Palestinians and Israelis to take constructive measures, to rebuild mutual trust and to create the right conditions for restarting negotiations, while avoiding unilateral steps, in particular settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. They advocated the earliest reunification of the Palestinians. A united position of the Palestinians, based

on the PLO principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, would contribute to progress towards a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, achieving lasting peace and providing security for all the countries and peoples of the region.

The participants were extremely concerned about security and stability in the Gulf region, where they called for political dialogue in resolving differences and are against the use and threat of force. They advocated settling the situation concerning the nuclear programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran only through political and diplomatic means and establishing dialogue between all the parties concerned, in particular between Iran and the P5+1 group, as well as between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency, in order to clarify the questions regarding Iran's nuclear programme. It has been emphasized that imposing additional and unilateral sanctions on Iran is counterproductive and would only exacerbate the situation. The BRICS States expressed their hope for the successful holding of the 2012 Conference to be attended by all States of the Middle East, on the establishment of the Middle East free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the States of the region.

The participants stressed the necessity of building a system of relations in the Gulf region that would guarantee equal and reliable security for all States of the subregion.

The participants agreed on the convenience of regular consultations on the Middle East and North Africa issues in different forums, including the United Nations, and reaffirmed their support for informal meetings among their representatives.

In this regard, I have the honour to request your kind assistance in having the contents of the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 36, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Vitaly **Churkin**